



TESTIMONY
of the
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES
to the
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 23, 2011

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 90% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony to you on issues of concern to towns and cities.

CCM asks the Committee's indulgence to thank the Governor again for keeping his promise to level fund the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant in the biennium.

Against the backdrop of a \$3.5 billion state budget deficit, he refused to pass the buck to local property taxpayers. While beneficial to all communities, it was a lifesaver for our poorer cities and towns across Connecticut.

HB 6385 "An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education".

This bill includes a number of issues of interest to towns and cities including, but not limited to:

TASK FORCE TO STUDY ECS (Section 14)

Would create a task force to study the ECS grant formula and how education money is distributed across the state. CCM supports this study.

As you are aware, the ECS grant is the largest state grant to local governments, and the principal mechanism for state funding of regular education and the base costs of special education programs in Connecticut.

If fully funded in FY 2011, ECS grants would be \$2.6 billion. The actual phased-in ECS grant for FY 2011 is just under \$1.9 billion, about 34% of the \$5.6 billion "foundation" level spending statewide. This means that 66% of the foundation spending level statewide still must come from mostly local revenue sources.

After accounting for inflation, today, one in four municipalities still receives less per pupil in ECS aid than under the \$250 per-pupil, flat-grant funding system that was determined to be unconstitutional in 1977.

A resourced study of the ECS grant and other education funding mechanisms is long overdue. CCM believes that the multi-year/multi-step process proposed by the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding for designing, piloting, and phasing in a new education funding system has merit.

MINIMUM BUDGET REQUIREMENT (Section 15)

Would provide some relief for local governments in meeting the minimum budget requirements (MBR). While this proposal is a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough to provide the relief local governments need as it only allows for reductions if student enrollment has decreased.

The continuation of this mandate means that, no matter what efficiencies can be found in board of education budgets, they cannot be reduced. In an era in which every other state and local agency are having their budgets closely examined, one entity – boards of education – are beyond effective scrutiny and shielded from taxpayer control. Connecticut is grappling with an enormous budget hole. Exempting any part of government from being reviewed for efficiencies is inappropriate.

There is no MBR for public safety. Public safety is the bedrock service provided by government.

K-12 public education costs approach 70% of most municipal budgets in our state. Yet, the MBR places the biggest chunk of the municipal budget beyond the democratic control of the people. The State, against a woefully inadequate education funding backdrop, forces municipalities to pay for the state's underfunding through even higher property taxes. No wonder Connecticut is the most reliant state in the nation to fund K-12 public education.

The Minimum Budget Requirement must be eliminated for FYs 12-13 to allow municipalities to find reasonable savings for their property taxpayers. CCM supports ensuring that state education aid is spent on education. Every community in Connecticut spends more on K-12 public education than they receive from the State.

CAPPING GRANTS AT THE LEVEL OF APPROPRIATIONS (Sections 1-9)

Would cap reimbursement for a number of funding streams to municipalities at the level of appropriations.

CCM understands the dire fiscal straits in which the State finds itself, but we underscore that capping reimbursements for grants inevitably shift costs to local governments and property taxpayers.

STUDY OF REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION & UNIFORM SCHOOL CALENDAR (Section 10)

Having the RESC Alliance study the feasibility of regional transportation services and a uniform school calendar are good ideas.

CCM urges that local chief elected officials and local school board representatives be included in this discussion to ensure that all important factors are thoroughly discussed and vetted, and to avoid any unintended consequences.

INCREASED FUNDING FOR CHOICE STUDENTS (Sections 12 & 13)

CCM supports providing additional funding to receiving districts for out-of-districts students they accept.

VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS (Sections 16-70)

Would significantly change the structure of Connecticut's Vocational-Technical (Vo-Tech) School System, including transferring the responsibility of some to local and regional boards of education.

This is a huge undertaking and CCM cautions that this be considered in a very deliberative manner with all pertinent officials -- local elected officials and boards of education -- at the table from the beginning to ensure that any actions taken are positive for the Vo-Tech students and school districts. For too long our Vo-Tech schools have been under-resourced.

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In closing, CCM looks forward to working with the Governor, the Education Committee, and members of the General Assembly to craft the best education policy for Connecticut, as we move through these difficult fiscal times and moving forward.

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If you have any questions, please contact

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